

FRESH VIEWS

January 9, 2003



Four freshman members of the House of Representatives discuss the start of the 108th Congress.

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JIM LEHRER: Now, new members of the House and to Terence Smith.

TERENCE SMITH: Four hundred and thirty-five members of the House of Representatives were sworn in earlier this week. They take the oath of office at a time when the country is facing continuing economic problems and the possibility of war against Iraq.



We've brought together four freshmen members to get their thoughts as this new term begins. They include two Republicans, Candice Miller of Michigan and Marsha Blackburn of Tennessee, and two Democrats, Artur Davis of Alabama and Raul Grijalva of Arizona.

Welcome to all four of you. Welcome to Washington, the broadcast.

What do you hope to accomplish?

leader.

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Candice Miller, what did you come to accomplish here in Congress?

REP. CANDICE MILLER: Well, we really started out this first week as freshmen, I think, hitting the ground with both feet running.

But when you think of all the challenges that are facing our nation today, certainly how we successfully prosecute the war in Iraq, we think about the economic growth and economic stimulus that we need to have, and obviously a lot of sort of the global issues are something I think all of us are very interested in, how we can protect Social Security and provide a prescription drug benefit for our seniors.

And then of course we all have our own parochial kind of interests that we have as well, and I live in the great state of Michigan, the Great Lakes state, and some of the things that I was campaigning on was how we can protect the Great Lakes. And so I consider myself very much an environmentalist and I'll be looking to do some things on that and water quality issues also. So a lot of different things on the plate, and I'm ready to go.



TERENCE SMITH: Artur Davis, what about the people in your district in Alabama?

REP. ARTUR DAVIS: Terry -

TERENCE SMITH: What did they hope - send you to do?

REP. ARTUR DAVIS: Terry, I happen to represent one of the three poorest congressional districts in the country. There are five counties in my district that have an average poverty rate of 40 percent, the unemployment rate is between 10 and 13 percent in four other counties so, you can imagine that as we go through a time of economic downturn, people who live in districts like mine are really hurting.

It's a very important time for people who are hurting in this country, and what I hope that we can agree on as Democrats and Republicans is that we have an obligation to finish the unfinished business here now.

**Rep. Artur Davis,
D-ALABAMA**

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It's no accident that the first real order of business for us was extending unemployment benefits. Close to 10,000 people in my state lost their unemployment insurance on Dec. 28, and I'm glad that after some struggle we came to an agreement yesterday to extend those benefits.

TERENCE SMITH: And you got to cast that vote?

REP. ARTUR DAVIS: Yes, we did. It's a very important time for people who are hurting in this country, and what I hope that we can agree on as Democrats and Republicans is that we have an obligation to finish the unfinished business here now.

TERENCE SMITH: Marsha Blackburn you arrived here from Tennessee with what as your priorities?

REP. MARSHA BLACKBURN: During my campaign I made a commitment to four things: to work to reduce the size of government, to reduce the taxes that people pay because if we want to do something to be sure that we have long-term economic growth and jobs creation in this country, reducing taxes is right at the top of that list; working to reform agencies of government, and working on governmental reform; working to reform the IRS and the INS; working to revitalize both the military and local education; and working to return power to local governments and to individuals, being sure that every vote that we cast is something that is going to preserve our individual freedom.

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TERENCE SMITH: Raul Grijalva, when you set out to run for Congress and now you're here, what are the priorities for you?

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REP. RAUL GRIJALVA: I think one of -- the greatest priority that people of my district handed me is the ability to be here. And I mean that not as a personal priority.



People in my district feel that this is the house of the people - Congress -- and that we need to be here vigorously debating and disclosing the major

issues that you outlined in the opening of this program. And I hope -- one of the things I want to accomplish and I hope that Congress accomplishes, I understand majority rule. I'm here because of majority will. Majority of the people in my district voted for me and I ended up in Congress.

So I hope in Congress we are allowed to have vigorous debates on alternatives, the proposals that the administration is bringing in to us, and also alternatives that the Republican majority is bringing to us, and that the Democrats have an equal say, not necessarily in their result, but an equal say in the discussion and the debate the American people need to hear.

President Bush's economic plan

TERENCE SMITH: Candice Miller when you arrived, the very day you were sworn in, the president unveiled his economic plan, and the day before the Democrats had done the same. What did you think of those proposals? Did they speak to some of the things that you have in mind?

REP. CANDICE MILLER: They did actually. And now I have to tell you I came to Washington as a George W. Bush Republican; if I had been a member of Congress when the tax cuts were proposed originally in the last Congress, I would have voted for them, so I was very interested and am very interested in voting to make those cuts permanent. So as a governor -- excuse me the president has unveiled his economic growth package, there are a number of critical elements in it that I think will absolutely be an economic stimulus.

And as was mentioned here, we did have a vote on the unemployment compensation and the extension of that for about five months, that's something in the immediacy, people have lost jobs -- in my state 86,000 people through no fault of their own have lost their jobs. So that was something I was proud to vote on.

But when we look at the economic growth proposal that President Bush has put forth, there are a number of things; for instance, the dividend, taxes on the dividend, which of course is double taxation, and I hear

I'm a person who believes philosophically generally that less government is better, less taxes are better, that people have a better idea of how to spend the hard earned dollars that they earn, the hard working men and women of this country.

Rep. Candice Miller,
R-MICHIGAN

some people say - and here we'll get into a little partisan debate perhaps - but that, you know, this is just a tax cut for the rich. Well, the reality is that life has changed and quite frankly those dividends now are paid, about 50 percent of them are paid to senior citizens who are looking really to stabilize their retirement income in many ways.

And so I - you know, sometimes people will say, well, only the right people should get tax cuts; well, I think everybody needs a tax cut. And so I'm a person who believes philosophically generally that less government is better, less taxes are better, that people have a better idea of how to spend the hard earned dollars that they earn, the hard working men and women of this country. I'm a fiscal conservative, and so I'm very interested in supporting the president's plan.

TERENCE SMITH: Congressman Davis, when you heard the president's plan, including all those elements, what was your reaction?

REP. ARTUR DAVIS: Terry, there are a few parts of the plan that I like, I think we do need to expand the tax relief for children and we do need expanded tax relief for married couples. There are a lot of parts of it that I don't think the American people will like.



When we talk about lifting taxation on corporate dividends, a lot of people in my district don't know a whole lot about corporate dividends. They do know that they need spending power right now. The president's plan is interesting to me; it would greatly expand the deficit without really affording relief to very many Americans.

It's a \$600 billion plan at a time when we can't afford it and does very little, in fact next to nothing, to help the states that are struggling. We have as much as a collective \$60 billion budget deficit facing our states right now. I would like to see tax relief for struggling states, for struggling companies, and for struggling

Americans, and we need a plan that I think rearranges our priorities along those lines.

TERENCE SMITH: Marsha Blackburn, what do you think?

REP. MARSHA BLACKBURN: You know, I think that the president has done some good things here, and I think that the jobs growth creation plan that he has brought forth is really a good thing. You know, you're talking about something that would affect millions of Americans.

There is no new government spending in this, nothing. There are going to be 2.1 million new jobs created by this. You're going to be seeing 46 million married couples get \$1700 in a tax cut this year. You're going to see 30 million single moms get a tax cut of over \$500. You're going to see more than 25 million small business owners get a \$2,000 a year tax cut. That is significant.

And if we want to do something that is going to energize the economy of the local level and for the states, this is great, because if that is going to put money into those local communities where it is going to turn over again and again in that local community, that is going to help our states, it's going to help out our local communities, and I think it's going to be just the boost that we need.



TERENCE SMITH: Congressman Grijalva, do you see it that way?

REP. RAUL GRIJALVA: I believe that the stimulus package proposed by Bush is short sighted and it's going to create a larger deficit in the future than we have now. In two years we went from surplus to deficit -- and in doing so I think this package is going to increase that deficit, and at the same time we are not putting disposable income in the hands of people.

There is no real job creation attached to this package,

and when 65 percent of the tax cut and the stimulus in this bill is acquired by 5 percent of the people in this country, that is not a fair or balanced or fiscally sound package.

And the package the Democrats propose is immediate, it's relief, it's sound, it creates jobs. It returns support to the states and local communities for homeland defense and security, for Medicare that is burdening all the local states. That's the kind of package we need to look with, one that is rational and one that's immediate.

Finding consensus

TERENCE SMITH: All right. So you see it very differently, obviously, and essentially on partisan lines. Candice Miller, how do you close that gap, how do you put something together, and particularly how do you do it or influence it as a freshman member?

REP. CANDICE MILLER: Well, let me say the first thing that I think is great is that we are all debating about a tax cut, not talking about whether or not we should even have one, so I think we all agree that something has to be done from an economic standpoint, and I think that's well on the way to a good bipartisan agreement to all of this.

But I think we all certainly want the same goals. And how we get there certainly will be a different route, I suppose. But as I say, I am in support of the president's growth package that he's put there.



But as a freshman, how much impact you actually have on these things, I feel as a Republican coming into the majority there, our leadership that we've elected on our side has been very inclusive of the freshman class certainly in the last two days, they have really reached out to the freshman class, and I'm certain that's happening on the Democratic side as well.

There's some incredible talent on both sides of the aisle and I'm feeling even though I'm a freshman I wasn't

certain if any of the fellows that have been there a long time would even talk to me there because we were freshmen.

TERENCE SMITH: And do they?

REP. CANDICE MILLER: They have. They've been very gracious. They haven't laughed at any of my questions yet, at least not to my face.

TERENCE SMITH: And the reception for you, Congressman Davis?

REP. ARTUR DAVIS: It's been very good. I'll tell you one thing that I think has encouraged all of us, we have an enormous sense of responsibility coming into this Congress and I think that cuts across party lines.

There are things, and yesterday is a good example as we voted to extend unemployment benefits, there are areas of agreement that we can find. I'd like to see some relief for some companies in this country and some small businesses in this country that are struggling, and frankly neither plan moves very far in that direction.

I think we have to break out of a lot of the partisan boxes that we've had and we've got to look at new ways, but this is a very different economy from what we faced as children and what our parents faced and we have to fashion new solutions to meet those new economic demands.

The possibility of war in Iraq

TERENCE SMITH: Well, you know, of course there's another huge issue that awaits you in the first weeks or months, perhaps of your term, this country could find itself at war with Iraq. What, what's your thought on that as you come into Congress, Marsha Blackburn?

REP. MARSHA BLACKBURN: Well, you know, that is something that we've talked a lot about, in my congressional district, because Ft. Campbell is located in Montgomery County, Tennessee, and of course the 101 Airborne, the special operations forces, are all

headquartered there.

In Tennessee we have a very active National Guard system. We have a lot of reserve units that are being called up, all of these are in rotation for activation. So it is something that we are very thoughtful on.



We know that the president, Sec. Powell, Sec. Rumsfeld, are going to move very cautiously and very carefully, and also very respectfully of the families that are involved in this because it's something that weighs heavily on our minds.

TERENCE SMITH: Congressman, do you find yourself in support of the administration's approach so far towards dealing with Saddam Hussein and Iraq?

REP. RAUL GRIJALVA: I don't believe that we should be patting the dog of war to the point that we are talking solely about preemptive strikes, talking about taking unilateral action. I think the process under the United Nations, and I agree with my colleague, we are asking young men and women in uniform that have taken an oath to serve this country and have volunteered to serve this country to put their lives at risk, and risk their families.

And we need to be conscious and protective of them and supportive of them -- the point being that we have a process that requires our allies to be with us, international support, and the United Nations inspections.



The request that I would have for the administration and for Congress as well to deliberate, we as a body, to show us the facts, give us a truth, give us the compelling information that will drive us to make a decision to risk a war. And I don't think we're there yet, and I think there's a fair process that we still need to

follow.

TERENCE SMITH: Now of course you're saying that and your views, Candice Miller, even though the previous Congress has given the president the authority to use "all means necessary --"

REP. CANDICE MILLER: Absolutely.

TERENCE SMITH: -- to bring about a regime change, and are you comfortable with that or do you feel there's a role to play still?

REP. CANDICE MILLER: I would have voted for the resolution if I had been in the previous Congress. And I will say that I think --

TERENCE SMITH: Would you all? Let me ask.

REP. ARTUR DAVIS: I would have.

TERENCE SMITH: You would have.

REP. MARSHA BLACKBURN: Yes.

TERENCE SMITH: You would have.

REP. MARSHA BLACKBURN: Yes.

REP. RAUL GRIJALVA: I would have not.

TERENCE SMITH: You would not have voted for it.

REP. RAUL GRIJALVA: I still feel as I said earlier that that process, international support rallying our allies, verification, U.N. inspections, that's the process we're undertaking now, and it's even been indicated today, to find that smoking gun and to get that verification and that truth and that information before the American people.



TERENCE SMITH: But, Candice Miller, you're comfortable with it?

REP. CANDICE MILLER: I

am very comfortable, in fact, I will tell you it is almost as if history, I think, will look at the remarkable team that we have in place right now, certainly with President Bush, Vice President Cheney, a former defense secretary, Condoleezza Rice, Rumsfeld, my goodness, unbelievable, Colin Powell, who we all had an opportunity to spend several hours with actually today.

This is I think a team -- probably the best team that our nation has to offer at this time for the challenges that are facing us, and I have a high degree of confidence in them and their ability to successfully prosecute the war on terror.

TERENCE SMITH: And finally, very briefly, Congressman Davis, your level of comfort with all of this?

REP. ARTUR DAVIS: Terry, I would have voted for the resolution, but I will tell you what does concern me: The distinction between Iraq and North Korea.



At this point a lot of us voted for the resolution believing that, or would have voted for the resolution on the theory there was a certain uniqueness about the Iraqi threat, that Iraq was unique in its ability and willingness to export terrorism around the world and to possess weapons of mass destruction.

Well, now we know that North Korea has been shipping Scud missiles to Yemen and is very aggressive about its nuclear program and isn't even feigning compliance with the U.N. sanctions.

TERENCE SMITH: Okay. Thank you all four. We'll stay tuned and check in with you again. Thank you.